

# **THE EFFECTS OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY ON MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS AMONG THE NIGERIAN MILITARY**

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## **Abstract**

*This study set out the origin and the organisation of Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern Nigeria. The researcher outlined the circumstances that led the involvement of the military in the Internal Security Operations of maintaining peace. The paper also Enumerated some of the effects of the insurgency on the Nigerian military such as corruption in the military, mutiny, intolerance, wearing of Hijab by the Muslim women in the barracks, attendance of ceremonial prayers and festivities in the barracks by the civilians surrounding, eg Jumma'at services, Itikaf, Eid ul - Fitr and Eid ul - Kabir. The insurgency also has effects on socio - economic transactions in the barracks and mammy markets. The findings include the emergence of insecurity in the Military Barracks and the diminishing of cordial relations between the Muslims and the Christians among the members of the Military. Library materials and interviews were used by the researcher as his sources of data collection.*

## **Introduction**

Within the last three decades Nigeria has witnessed a variety of disturbances some of which have threatened the corporate existence of the country as a nation. Some of these disturbances could be described as intra-religious, while others are inter-religious. There are others that are more of political or tribal in nature than religious, even though some people may see them as religious, simply because people involved came from different religions.”<sup>1</sup>

The movement that later became Boko Haram have an ambition of establishing a theocratic state along the lines of the Sokoto Caliphate founded in the nineteenth century under Usman Dan

Fodio. Northern Nigeria took the limelight from Pakistan and Afghanistan in July 2009 in terms of global attention on Terrorism where over 1000 people lost their lives in few days of violence in some parts of

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1. Sajo A.M, Parallel Ideologies Islam and Boko Haram. 2015

the region. Radical group of Boko Haram launched attacks on police and government targets in a bid to advance their claim that modern western culture is haram (forbidden) and they should rely entirely on Islamic culture. It is against this background that the emergency of Boko Haram can be understood.

### **Origin of Boko Haram**

The group calls itself “Ahlus-Sunnah Wal-Jama’a ala minhaj as – Salaf”. Which means “People who follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Community (of Muslims), in line with earliest generation of Muslim”. Thereafter, the group modified this name to “Jama’atu ahlus Sunnah Lidda’awati wal Jihad”, meaning People who follow the way of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Islamic propagation and struggle.” The immediate community residing close to the group members and the media nickname it BOKO HARAM based on reasons known to them, this nickname became more popular because of the media preference to it both local and international.<sup>2</sup>

The word “Boko” in classical Hausa language literally means deception or deceit,

as used in the Hausa term “Amaryar boko”, which means “fake bride”. Or “bride of deception”. This is sometimes a feature in the traditional Hausa wedding where a grandmother usually dress up like the bride as part of a practical joke played on the groom professor Mahdi Adamu Ngaski defined “Boko” simply as “Fake”.

Shaikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky said boko originates from the Arabic word “Buka’u” meaning crying.<sup>3</sup>

“Haram” is an Arabic word, meaning something Islamically unacceptable, forbidden or prohibited. “Boko Haram” may therefore be interpreted as Western Education is Islamically prohibited, it could also be interpreted to mean evangelism deceptively camouflaged as Western Education is Islamically unacceptable.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

Boko Haram was founded in 2002, by a young man called Muhammad Ali. His vision was to have an Islamic Nigeria, and he began with the concept of achieving it through setting up a model Islamic state somewhere in the desert in Yobe State. When he set up that, he invited his friend, Muhammad Yusuf, who later became the leader of Boko Haram. The idea of Muhammad Ali was to set up a modern Islamic city in the bush, that would gradually spread to overcome the whole of Nigeria. Somehow, the authorities got wind of this, and then, a fight started between members of the group and security agencies which became what is known as the “Yobe Taliban.”<sup>5</sup>

Muhammad Ali and many members of his Modern Islamic State were killed, and other members of Boko Haram ran to Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Muhammad Yusuf disagreed with Muhammad Ali on how the Boko Haram group should be run, so he did not join the armed struggle rather, he move to Maiduguri and started preaching and propagating the word of Islam from his own understanding.

And he got a place where he established his mosque, which he named “The Ibn Taymiyyah Mosque”<sup>6</sup>

## **Main Reason for Military Intervention:**

### **Inefficiency of the Nigeria Police Force**

The Nigerian Government underestimated the security threat posed by Boko Haram and without any defined strategy to counter the Menace. The Federal Government used the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in an effort to checkmate the activities of Boko Haram. Before the 2009 security crackdown of the group in Maiduguri, the police made use of road blocks and mass arrests to contain their activities.<sup>7</sup> Roadblocks set up to prevent the group from moving arms around where quickly turned into opportunities for police to collect bribes.

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5. Ibid

6. Ibid

7. Andrew, W. 'What is Boko Haram' United State Institute of Peace. June. 2012, P.5

The police were not trained in intelligence gathering and most contact they have had with the local community was at the level of the roadblock, with officers casting guilt on those who flee. The lack of accountability also affected the police operation as their response to an attack was to round up as many people as possible at the site of the incident, often long after gunmen or the bombers have fled. Instead of gathering intelligence, they were often accused of intimidating local people and extorting money from them.<sup>8</sup>

Other tactics also used by the police included arresting family members of people believed to be members of Boko Haram as hostages. The police's tactics have also made Boko Haram members harder to catch. The local people in the North-East became more scared of the police than members of Boko Haram. Ordinary people would not go to the police to report suspicious activities in their neighbourhood.<sup>9</sup> These measures taken by the police to curb the activities of Boko Haram was ineffective and the Federal

Government responded by setting up the Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2003.

### **The Effects of the Crises on the Military**

The government announced the formation of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division of the Nigerian Army with its headquarters in Maiduguri. The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was established in August 2013 and the 1000 troops that returned from an operation in Mali formed the nucleus of the new division.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division of the Nigerian Army in Maiduguri was intended to stem the tide of attacks by insurgents in the North-East. The establishment of the new division became imperative, since the Joint Task Force battling the insurgents in the North-East is an adhock arrangement, which could be disbanded at any time.

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8. An interview with Usman Abubakar, at Maiduguri, 12, June, 2015

9. Ibid

10. "Jonathan Creates New Army Division, Sends 8,000 Troops after Boko Haram". Vanguard 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2018

## **Corruption and Mutiny**

The Boko Haram crisis have exposed corruption within the military in cases like not paying soldiers their allowances as at when due and a lot of others which was hidden before. The army was unable to provide the soldiers with the necessary hardware, tools for obtaining intelligence and even food and accommodation to successfully engage the insurgents. Rather than continue to be sabotaged, humiliated and killed by the corruption of the military to command.

In May, 2014 some soldiers revolted against their General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, Major General Abubakar Muhammed by shooting sporadically in the Maimalari barracks, which is also home to the Artillery Corps, the Ordinance, as well as army signals in Maiduguri. The soldiers complained that their supervisors have failed to provide them with adequate weaponry with which to fight the war against the better armed Boko Haram.<sup>11</sup>

Mutiny by soldiers has exposed the corruption in procurement and poor maintenance of acquired assets, low morale among troops demoralized by inadequate support and heavy casualties and sabotage by Boko Haram sympathizers have all undercut the military's ability.

Not fewer than sixty-six soldiers were sentenced to death for mutiny and refusing others to fight against Boko Haram since August 2014.<sup>12</sup>

## **Hijab Intolerance**

Islam fixed a minimal limit of decency for dressing at times of prayer and devotion. Women must keep her whole body covered, except for the face, hands and feet. It is in such attire that it was recommended to her to appear in society. Hijab is the proper Islamic dress code which is primarily intended to safeguard the modesty,

dignity and honour of men and women. By wearing Hijab, women protect themselves from any lustful gaze or act that may expose them to temptation or harassment of any kind.<sup>13</sup>

11. "Another Revolt at 7<sup>th</sup> Army Division in Borno State". Daily Mail 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2014.
12. "Nigerian Military Sentences 54 Soldiers to death for mutiny". Premium Times. 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2014.
13. Sajo, A.M, "The Effects of Banning Hijab for Security Reasons." 2016

Allah Almighty said in Q33 v 59 "O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them. That will be better so that they may be recognized and not annoyed." One may evaluate the noble intentions of Islam, when it imposes decent dress as a requirement for social life, Fashion was in no way taken into consideration. Wearing of Hijab to Muslim women is an act of worship and it is enforced in Islam till date.<sup>14</sup>

In view of the above, wearing Hijab to Muslim women is not an optional. However, with the new tactics of Boko Haram members using women to hide bombs in their Hijab to attack military check points and other military formations, military personnel begins to hate the dressing by the Muslim women in their respective barracks. Soldiers on duty at the gate of every military barracks do ask every woman that wears Hijab to remove it for proper checking before they could allow her entrance. This measures taken by the soldiers in forcing Muslim women to remove their Hijab at the gate of entering any military formations brought serious tension between Muslims and Christians officers.

### **Restricting Civilians access to Mosques in the Barracks**

Communities that were living near the military barracks for long were enjoying access to the Barracks mosques and churches, either on Fridays or Sundays. Civilians were allowed to perform I'tikaf for about 10 days during the month of Ramadan in the Jumma'at Mosque of every military Barracks (Army, Navy and Air Force)

ceremonial prayers such as Eid el Fitr and Eid el Kabir that are yearly events do take place in all the military Barracks parade ground and majority of the worshippers are civilians. This shows how cordial relationship between the military and the civilians.

With the emergence of Boko Haram insurgence this relationship between the military and the civilians patronizing military barracks started to diminish. Mosques in the Barracks became so much restricted to only military personnel within the Barracks where the mosque is located. I'tikaf to none residents in the

14. Ibid

Barracks was banned, where Muslims outside the Barracks must come in for one reason or the other, they must undergo extraordinary checks all in fear of Boko Haram members. This act of checks by the soldiers also create tension between Muslims and Christians officers. This is because the restrictions affects Muslims more than how it affects the non Muslims.

### **Business Transactions**

The most popular means of transport, commercial motorcycles known as “Okada or Achaba” was banned to enter any Military Barracks nationwide. This is as a result of the members of Boko Haram’s tactics of using motorcycles to bomb their targets which military formations is their biggest targets. Mammy markets are the business areas attached to almost all the Military Barracks nationwide, and the custodians of these mammy markets are the military personnel and their families with few civilians that live outside the Barracks. Boko Haram insurgents targeted and bomb Mogadishu Barrack’s mammy market in 2014 in Abuja. Thereafter serious security measures taken to protect other mammy markets in all the barracks nationwide. These security measures put in place to avoid future occurrence of bomblast, majority of civilians buying or

selling in these mammy markets relocate elsewhere, which have a great effect economically in these Barracks and add more hardship to residents in these Barracks. As usual most of these people affected such as meat sellers, vegetables and fruits are Muslims, as a result of this tension between Muslims and Christians officers intensifies.

## **Conclusion**

Religious tolerance and living in a peaceful co-existence between Muslims and none Muslims, the Jews, the Christians was what the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught his followers long ago. Boko Haram insurgents become a big threat to the long existing cordial relationship between Muslims and Christians among the civilians as a whole and among the military in particular.

Muslims and Christians in Military Barracks live side by side, they share the same military culture and way of life. They operate within the same economic and political system. Military Officers have so many things to unite them together irrespective of their differences in religion, and these things include the training, discipline, dressing, sports and many more. Boko Haram insurgency has effects to the Nigeria Military which among others expose the corruption in the higher level of the military, mutiny by the soldiers, diminishing cordial relationship between the military and the surrounding civilians. It also encouraged Hijab intolerance, depriving civilians from having access to mosques situated in the military formations etc.

## End Note

1. Sajo A.M, Parallel Ideologies Islam and Boko Haram. 2015
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. Andrew, W. 'What is Boko Haram' United State Institute of Peace.  
June. 2012, P.5
8. An interview with Usman Abubakar, at Maiduguri, 12, June, 2015
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13. Sajo, A.M, "The Effects of Banning Hijab for Security Reasons."  
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14. Ibid